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Report From OAS Committee

Panama Probe Clears Castro

By VIRGINIA PREWETT

As might have been predicted, Fidel Castro promises to come out the winner when the Organization of American States investigation of the Jan. 9 Panamanian riots is completed.

An early leak from the OAS investigating committee in Panama first of all minimizes the communist role in the fatal riots at the edge of the Canal Zone.

While not formally condemning the U. S. for aggression, the committee's findings reportedly do condemn the U. S. forces for over-energetic action against Panamanian civilians. This neatly gives the communist anti-American propaganda machine its "New World Hungary," with the U. S. as the villain.

The advance news from Panama omits mention of Panamanian responsibility in the disorders. The riots were obviously far from spontaneous nor did Panamanian forces seek to check them for 26 hours. If Castroites aren't to blame here, then the Chiari government or other Panamanians are. But it seems that Panamanians, like the communists, may get off scot free.

The most significant fact in the advance notice is the whitewash of Castro's Cuba.

It was to be foreseen that Cuba would come in for gentle treatment when Mexico's OAS Ambassador, Dr. Vicente Sanchez Gavito, took a leading part in forming the investigating committee. He began to do so, it is true, after other Latin Americans who had worked hard on the Peace Committee

did not want to touch the formal investigation of the Jan. 9 riots.

'GO EASY' GROUP

The Mexico's relations with the U. S. improve yearly, Dr. Sanchez Gavito belongs to the hard-core "go-easy-on-Castro" group of Mexican officials. He worked actively to get the representative of another government with pro-Castro leanings, that of Brazil, on the investigating committee.

This was accomplished thru a squeeze play. The U. S. was openly accused in the OAS of not wanting Brazil on the committee. The U. S. then felt obliged to say that Brazil's presence would be acceptable.

A deeper truth in this situation is that the U. S. diplomatic team in Panama headed by Assistant Secretary of State Edwin Martin did not try very hard to make a case against the Castro communists.

NOT IMPORTANT

Even before the OAS investigating committee went to Panama, this team told U. S. newsmen that the communist role in the Jan. 9 riots couldn't have been so important after all.

The State Department is notoriously divided on the question of Castro's Cuba. We appear to be heading into another episode in which the "soft-on-Castro" school of thought triumphs again.

Nor would it be the first time that soft-on-Castro Mexican and Brazilian attitudes have had behind-scenes aid and comfort from our own "go-easy-on-Castro" diplomats.